130484 - Some criticisms of the belief of Ibn Rushd (Averroes)

the question

What is the belief of Imam Ibn Rushd, and what was the true nature of his difference of opinion with Imam Abu Haamid al-Ghazaali?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Ibn Rushd is a name that was shared between Ibn Rushd the grandson (known to the West as Averroes) and Ibn Rushd the grandfather. Both of them had the kunyah Abu'l-Waleed, and both of them had the name Muhammad ibn Ahmad. Both were appointed as qaadi (judge) of Cordoba.

The one referred to in the question is Ibn Rushd the grandson (Averroes), who died in 595 AH. He is famous for his focus on philosophy and writing books in that field. As for Ibn Rushd the grandfather, he did not get involved in philosophy; he died in 520 AH.

Al-Abbaar said:

He attained a level of perfection, knowledge and virtue that was unsurpassed in Andalusia. He was a modest and humble man, of whom it was said that he was never distracted from researching and studying academic issues since he reached the age of discernment, except on two nights: the night his father died and his wedding night. In terms of books and other writings he filled almost ten thousand pages. He had a strong inclination towards philosophy, and became a leading figure in that field. People would turn to him to ask him his verdict on medical issues as much as they would ask him about matters of fiqh. He also had a deep knowledge of the Arabic language, and it

was said that he had memorised the diwaans (collected poems) of Abu Tammaam and al-Mutanabbi.

Among the most famous of his works were the following: Bidaayat al-Mujtahid, on fiqh; al-Kulliyaat (Generalities) on medicine; Mukhtasar al-Mustasfa on usool; and many other works on philosophy, in which he summarised the thoughts of the Greek philosophers. So he wrote Jawaami' Kutub Aristotalis; a summary of al-Ilaahiyyaat by Nicolaus of Damascus, a Greek philosopher; and a summary of Aristotle's Metaphysics) b Aristotle. He also summarised many other books, of which there are too many to list here, to the point that he was known as the one who propagated and carried the banner of Aristotelian thought. That ultimately led to him becoming isolated, and he was shunned by the people of his era because of the strange views that he expressed and the weird, alien knowledge that he propagated.

Shaykh ash-Shuyookh Ibn Hamawiyyah said:

When I entered the city, I asked about Ibn Rushd and I was told that he was under house arrest on the orders of the caliph Ya'qoob, and no one was allowed to visit him, because of the many strange views that were narrated from him, and the many shunned branches of knowledge that were attributed to him. He died under house arrest in Marrakesh.

You can see his biography in Siyar A'laam an-Nubala' (21/307-310)

Secondly:

There has been a lengthy debate on the real nature of the beliefs of Ibn Rushd, and many books have been written both supporting him and opposing him. There has been a great deal of confusion as to his real beliefs and views.

Because here we do not have the time or space for a detailed discussion of the beliefs of Ibn Rushd, it will suffice to point out some of the flawed ideas in his books that are subject to

controversy.

1. Interpretation of Islamic teachings so as to be in harmony with Aristotelian philosophy

Perhaps looking at the brief biography of Ibn Rushd referred to above will be sufficient to highlight this inclination in the thought of Ibn Rushd. He was infatuated with the thought of Aristotle to the extent that Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said of him: He is one of the most adherent of people to the views of Aristotle. End quote from Bayaan Talbees al-Jahamiyyah (1/120). Ibn Rushd tried hard to explain Aristotelian thought and present it to the people in a new Arabic style. Whilst doing that, when he saw a contradiction between Aristotelian thought and the fundamentals of Islam, he would try to find a far-fetched interpretation that could lead to undermining and destroying Islam. It was as if Aristotelian philosophy was the counterpart of the teachings of Islam which came from the Lord of the Worlds and are embodied in the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah. It was on this basis that he wrote his famous book Fasl al-Maqaal fi Taqreer ma bayna ash-Sharee'ah wa'l-Hikmah min al-Ittisaal (The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy).

2. His belief that Islamic teachings have both exoteric (apparent) and esoteric (hidden) meanings

Ibn Rushd said:

Islamic teachings are of two categories: exoteric (apparent) and esoteric (hidden). The exoteric or apparent meanings are for the masses to adhere to and follow, and the esoteric or hidden meanings are for the scholars. As for the masses, what they must do is understand Islamic teachings according to the apparent meaning, and refrain from interpreting them in any manner other than the apparent meaning. It is not permissible for the scholars to explain them to the masses in any way other than in accordance with the apparent meaning. As 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Tell the people what they can understand; do you want the words of Allah and His Messenger to be rejected? End quote.

Al-Kashf ‘an Manaahij al-Adillah (p. 99); published by Markaz Diraasaat al-Wahdah al-‘Arabiyyah

Ibn Rushd discussed this esoteric idea at length in his books, to the extent that he regarded it as one of the main characteristics of the saved group of the ummah of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) who adhere to the exoteric aspects of the teachings of Islam, and they do not disclose their esoteric meanings to the people. End quote.

Al-Kashf ‘an Manaahij al-Adillah (p. 150)

Hence Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote at length refuting the views of Ibn Rushd in this book and explaining that esoteric interpretation of Islamic texts is flawed. These discussions appear in his two significant books, Bayaan Talbees al-Jahamiyyah and Dar’u Ta‘aarud al-‘Aql wa’n-Naql.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

When Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and his ilk realised that the words of the Messenger cannot be interpreted in this philosophical manner – rather they became certain that the meaning that he intended was what the people understood – they tried to explain that by saying: He was addressing the masses in a manner that they could understand, even though he knew that the truth with regard to that particular issue was not as the people understood it. Hence what these people were effectively saying was that the Messengers lied in order to serve a purpose. This is the way of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and others who follow esoteric interpretations (baatiniyyah). End quote.

Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (19/157)

3. Favouring philosophical views regarding the resurrection and requital

With regard to the issue of resurrection and requital, he favoured the view of the philosophers that

the resurrection would be of souls only. In fact in this regard he fell into misguidance that was more grievous than simply believing in the philosophical view that the resurrection would be of souls only, as he regarded this issue as being one that is subject to ijtihaad, and said that what is required of anyone who examines the matter is to believe in the conclusion that he reaches. He said:

The truth concerning this issue is that what every individual must do is believe the conclusion to which his research leads him. End quote.

Al-Kashf ‘an Manaahij al-Adillah (p. 204)

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The followers of philosophy are further removed from the path of Islam than ahl al-kalaam:

Among them are some who think that this is part of the religion of Islam.

And among them are some who have more knowledge of religious texts than others, so they started to reject the views of ahl al-kalaam unless they are supported by a text. Whenever there was a text to support their views, they would deal with that text in one of two ways: either they would accept it completely, if it was in accordance with their understanding and thoughts, or they would deal with it like all other similar cases, and say that the Messengers spoke of that by way of comparison in order to help the people understand (and it is not to be taken literally), because there was no other way to explain it and therefore they needed to put it in these words. Ibn Rushd and others like him followed this method, therefore they are closer to Islamic teachings than Ibn Sina and his ilk. In terms of practical issues, they were closer to the limits of Islam than those who neglected Islamic duties and regarded as permissible that which Islam forbids. However both groups are somewhat deviant, commensurate with the extent to which they went against the Qur’an and Sunnah, and they are correct and sound in as much as they are in harmony with

them.

Hence with regard to the issue of the universe being created (and not having existed from eternity) and the resurrection of bodies, Ibn Rushd took a neutral stance and stated that both views were valid, although he was more inclined in his heart to his predecessor (Aristotle). He responded to the comments of al-Ghazaali in Tahaafut at-Tahaafut, but many of his arguments are incorrect and al-Ghazaali was in the right. He attributed some of his arguments to Ibn Sina and not to his predecessor (Aristotle), and he attributed any mistakes to Ibn Sina. In some of his arguments he spoke ill of al-Ghazaali and accused him of being unfair, because he based his views on flawed kalaami arguments, such as the idea that God does not have to have a reason or wisdom behind what He does, and that the One Who is all powerful and able to choose may decide to choose one thing over another for no reason. And some of his arguments were very confused and unclear. End quote.

Minhaaj as-Sunnah (1/255)

4. Failure to pay attention to the Sunnah as a source of legislation

One of the main characteristics of the methodology of Ibn Rushd in his books, which at the same time was one of the main reasons for his errors, was his failure to pay attention to the Prophetic Sunnah as a source of legislation.

Dr Khaalid Kabeer ‘Allaal (may Allah preserve him) said:

Ibn Rushd did not pay due attention to the Prophetic Sunnah and its status as a main source of Islamic legislation after the Holy Qur’an, and he did not quote it widely in his books of kalaam and philosophy. Therefore he missed out on many hadiths that are directly connected to many of the academic topics that he discussed. Moreover, in many cases he did not correctly understand many of the hadiths that he did quote in his books, and he subjected them to misinterpretation in order

to support his views and his Aristotelian ideas. End quote.

Naqd Fikr al-Faylasoof Ibn Rushd (p. 97)

This is a brief overview that highlights some of the scholarly criticism of the beliefs of Ibn Rushd (Averroes). This criticism may be summed up by noting that he overlooked many of the Islamic guidelines that were clearly laid out by the Lawgiver, and he promoted the method of interpreting the texts in a manner other than their apparent meaning and subjecting some clear texts to ijtihaad, on the basis of some weird, alien ideas that had come from ancient civilisations that have perished.

Because of that, he is celebrated by many of those who are part of the liberal secular trends today, to the point that they think of the philosopher Ibn Rushd as a pioneer of enlightenment, even though they know that much of the knowledge in his books is regarded as extinct and wrong by modern standards of knowledge. But their aim is to glorify all liberal thoughts and ideas that are not in harmony with the fundamentals of Islam and are contrary to the facts mentioned in Islamic texts, and they resort to interpreting these texts in a very weird manner, whilst at the same time presenting themselves as people of religious commitment and Islamic knowledge and understanding. In Ibn Rushd they see what they are looking for, and they regard his books as pioneering works. We think that in his books you will find promotion of adherence to Islam and referring to it, which we do not find in the books of these modern thinkers. He adhered to the practical side of Islamic teachings and venerated those teachings in the fields of fiqh, judicial rulings and issuing fatwas, that would not be pleasing to these modern thinkers, and they would not even match up to one tenth of his level of knowledge. “May Allah destroy them, how they are deluded away from the truth!”[at-Tawbah 9:30].

And Allah knows best.